



February 2006

Bachelor of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies Eastern Washington University

Introduction

Eastern Washington University (EWU) seeks Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) approval to offer a Bachelor of Arts degree in Women's and Gender Studies (WGST). The program would offer students an opportunity to develop critical thinking, writing, and communication skills through an interdisciplinary examination of women's roles, contributions, history, and experiences and through the critical study of gender structures in societies and cultures. The program would begin in fall 2006.

Relationship to Institutional Role and Mission and the Strategic Master Plan

The program would draw on the strength of the existing undergraduate minor in women's studies. The current minor has been in place since 1975 and is an important example of Eastern's commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship. The program draws on faculty and coursework from a variety of disciplines. In addition to serving students wishing to complete a minor, the program is an important part of the general education curriculum providing 11 courses that meet the university's gender and cultural diversity requirement. These courses would serve as the core for the proposed bachelor of arts degree.

Program goals are consistent with the statewide strategic master plan goals of providing opportunities for students to earn degrees and responding to the state's economic needs. The program would provide students access to a baccalaureate degree program that would provide them with the critical thinking, writing, and communication skills that are essential in today's workplace. In addition, students who complete the program would have a foundation that would prepare them to work effectively with a diverse and changing workforce.

Program Need

The WGST program responds to needs expressed by students, employers, and community stakeholders. The HECB's state and regional needs assessment finds a need for additional

growth in the social sciences to respond to student, employer, and community demand. The past three years have seen very little growth in the number of degrees awarded in the social sciences; however, data indicate growth in a number of occupational fields that draw social sciences graduates, particularly human services fields for which an undergraduate degree in women's and gender studies would provide excellent preparation (especially when combined with appropriate graduate-level study). In addition, EWU consulted a variety of sources of information to establish student, employer, and community demand for the proposed program.

Student interest in the program was assessed through an examination of enrollment trends in WGST coursework and surveys administered to students. Over the past five years, the number of students choosing to minor in women's studies has increased from 15 per year to 35 per year in 2004-05. Results of student surveys conducted in 2003 and 2004 indicate that 61 students intended to complete a minor and 46 would likely select women's studies as a major if it was available. More generally, the survey found a great deal of interest in, and support for, the program. Some students expressed a need for the program as a way of fostering diversity and understanding on campus. A number of students saw the program as a complement to a range of other majors; and some students indicated a desire to pursue a double major, which is something the program could effectively accommodate in many cases.

Program developers also sought input from the community through a series of discussion groups with students, faculty, and community members. A key point raised during the discussion groups was the need to provide a great deal of flexibility in program requirements so that students could build out from the core curriculum in a variety of ways. The discussion groups also identified a need to find ways for students to apply what they learn. The program responded with a capstone requirement that includes a service learning project in which students will join with women's groups and community organizations that work on gender equity and promote social justice for women. The demand for the program and the need to integrate with service learning was strongly supported by the external reviewers.

The program would be the only baccalaureate degree program in women's studies in the Spokane area. Currently, the closest option for residents of the Spokane region is WSU Pullman. The women's and gender studies program is unique in its design as well. By including two interdisciplinary foundation courses in theory and research methods, the program follows the recommendation of the FIPSE-funded Social and Behavioral Sciences Curriculum Integration Project. In addition, the program would offer students the opportunity to receive credit through EWU's Prior Learning Option that is currently available only to students in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program.

Program Description

The WGST program draws on the strengths of EWU's current undergraduate minor in women's studies. The program would be developed using currently offered coursework and established faculty from a broad range of disciplines.

Graduates would be prepared for work in a variety of fields, with their skills and knowledge directly applicable to organizations that focus on service and advocacy on a range of social justice issues including housing, health, income security, and freedom from violence. In addition, the program would provide an excellent background for further study at the graduate level. The program would seek to develop in students a broad understanding of interdisciplinary scholarship and the role of women and gender in society, as well as an understanding of diversity and equity in society. Specific skills developed in the program would include critical thinking and analytical skills, writing skills, and communication skills.

The proposed program would consist of 45-52 quarter credits (30-35 semester credits). In addition, students would be required to complete a minor or certificate in another area, or complete a second major. Students would enter the program with a general education background and, in most cases, progress through the curriculum in four years. Adult learners who have acquired specialized professional or paraprofessional experience would have the option of developing a portfolio to document prior learning. Students could earn up to 45 credits toward general elective requirements using the prior learning option.

The curriculum would consist of 13-15 quarter credits of introductory and foundation coursework, including courses in theory and research methods. Students would engage in an additional 32-37 credits of required elective coursework.

The program would accommodate 10 FTE students in Year One and grow to 30 FTE at full enrollment in Year Five. Currently, the coursework that would make up the women's studies major is offered by a contingent of more than 20 faculty from a broad range of disciplines. Many of the courses are cross-listed with the "home" department of the faculty member. That practice is expected to continue; however, the plan does include a process to formally appoint faculty to the program through the use of affiliate faculty appointments and joint faculty appointments. Currently, 15 faculty have applied for affiliate status and the program director holds a joint appointment in women's studies and modern languages and literature. Through these mechanisms, the program would offer students a richer set of courses, as well as access to a larger faculty than would be otherwise available in a small program.

Students would be assessed based on clearly defined learning outcomes through evaluation of a capstone project and individual assignments. A rating scale would be used to assess student progress toward program outcomes. On a rotating basis, courses would be evaluated to assess assignments and exams. Every three years, courses meeting EWU's gender and cultural diversity requirement are assessed by the institution's General Education Coordinating Committee. Finally, an external advisory board made up of eight to ten community leaders would provide feedback on the curriculum.

The program would also be assessed using multiple measures and data sources. Clearly defined program objectives are established in the proposal; and the department would draw on the experience of seniors in the program, recent graduates, alumni, employers, and community members (through surveys and focus groups) to assess the degree to which the program is meeting its objectives, and identify areas and strategies for improvement.

Diversity

The program is designed to fit in Eastern's overall diversity planning. The program offers 11 courses that meet the university gender and cultural diversity requirement, and the department currently offers a number of cross-listed courses and co-sponsored presentations with the African American Education, American Indian Studies, and Chicano Studies departments. Recruitment for the program would be in concert with ongoing efforts by the office of admissions to attract a diverse student body.

External Review

The program was reviewed by two external experts – Noël Sturgeon, women's studies chair at Washington State University, and Susan Feiner, director of women's studies at the University of Southern Maine. Both reviewers expressed support for the program, citing a "pressing need" for this program and applauding the strong interdisciplinary core curriculum.

Professor Sturgeon provided enthusiastic support for the program and indicated that it would not conflict with other programs currently offered in Washington. In addition, she cited the strong demographic pool in the Spokane area. Overall, Sturgeon's assessment was that the program is consistent with programs nationally and is ready for implementation. She raised some concerns about administrative aspects of the program, suggesting that the program employ a full-time director and make additional use of joint faculty, with the caveat that joint appointments can be challenging (especially for new faculty), so mentoring may be important. In addition, she suggested a greater emphasis on service learning prior to the capstone project. Finally, Sturgeon suggested that the program be well prepared for success because it may grow faster than anticipated.

Professor Feiner highlighted a pressing need for the program and characterized the proposed program as "well conceived and pragmatic." She was impressed with the prior-learning option and felt that students in the program would be well-served by this alternative. She found that the proposal included a robust and fully-interdisciplinary curriculum, but suggested some curriculum modifications may be necessary in the theory and methods courses. She echoed Professor Sturgeon's concern about the director's position possibly needing to be full-time, and felt faculty officially being appointed to the department would be important to successful implementation of the program.

Program developers responded to the concerns raised in the review, clarifying that service learning is integrated into many of the courses and is required in the capstone course. Those implementing the program also would look for opportunities to continue to expand and improve their use of service-learning opportunities. With regard to program administration, program developers indicated that the movement to affiliated faculty was part of a strategy to formally constitute the women's and gender studies faculty cohort. In addition, they described the work of the WGST curriculum committee as more comprehensive than the name would imply, and

clarified that it would encompass a range of planning and coordination activities. Finally, program developers indicated that although the planned administrative support for the program would be commensurate with planned enrollment in the program, administrative support would grow as the program grew, if necessary.

Program Costs

The program would enroll 10 FTE students in the Year One, and grow to 30 FTE at full enrollment in Year Five.

The program draws on existing coursework and a contingent of more than 20 current faculty to deliver the required and elective coursework. The program director holds a joint appointment with another department and is assigned 66 percent to the women's studies program. The program costs described in the proposal are not new; rather, they reflect the allocation of existing resources to support the proposed degree program. The program would require a .5 FTE administrative staff position and a .75 FTE clerical staff position. Total faculty commitment is .66 FTE.

No additional startup funds or capital improvements are required for implementation of the program.

Total cost for the program is \$11,464 per FTE in the Year One and \$4,170 per FTE at full enrollment in Year Five, which is below the average cost per FTE in social sciences programs at EWU.

Staff Analysis

The proposed program would support the unique role and mission of the institution by providing students with an opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary scholarship while developing skills in critical thinking and analysis, writing, and communication.

The program also addresses the statewide strategic master plan goals of providing opportunities for students to earn degrees and responding to the economic needs of the state by providing students with access to knowledge that will enable them to respond to a changing and diverse workforce. The program also would provide students with the skills required to fill needed roles in the state's economy and/or successfully complete graduate work.

The program draws on an experienced and well-qualified faculty; however, the administrative structure of the program does raise some concern about sustainability over time. While the program would build on the infrastructure developed for the minor and that of the existing women's center, the vast majority of the faculty would not be appointed and tenured within the women's studies program. Rather, the program relies on voluntary participation of faculty from

a variety of other programs and departments that offer courses within the major. While this approach appears to have been successful for the minor for a very long time, the transition to a major entails a greater level of detail in terms of advising individual students. In addition, the total number of students served by the current program has increased significantly and is expected to continue to grow. These concerns were raised during the external review process and acknowledged by program developers. Developing affiliate faculty appointments and strengthening the curriculum committee into more of a steering committee structure are moves in the right direction; but, over time, further institutionalization of the program through additional joint appointments and more administrative resources would likely be needed. HECB staff recommend joint appointments be used to increase faculty for the program to at least 1.5 FTE at full enrollment, and the director and support staff FTE levels be increased commensurate with the number of student FTEs in the program.

The proposal outlines a well-defined, student-level assessment system with clear learning outcomes, including a comprehensive assessment of a capstone project. The proposal also lays out an assessment approach for the program as a whole that involves a variety of stakeholders and an external advisory group. The proposed program offers a well-defined assessment system with clear learning and program outcomes.

The program responds to demonstrated student, employer, and community needs, consistent with the state and regional needs assessment and the institution's own assessment of need.

The proposal outlines the role of the program in supporting diversity on campus, as well as strategies to integrate the program with campus efforts to attract a diverse student body.

The program would not duplicate existing programs. Estimated costs are reasonable; however, there is some question as to the degree to which the estimates accurately reflect the time commitment of the administrator and participating faculty. For example, it is not clear that faculty time outside the classroom in activities such as the curriculum committee are reflected in the administrative costs associated with the program. If faculty numbers are increased in Year Five to the level recommended by HECB staff, the cost per FTE would be approximately \$6,172 – just below average for social science majors at EWU.

Recommendation

Based on careful review of the program proposal and supplemental sources, HECB staff recommend approval of the Bachelor of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies at Eastern Washington University.

RESOLUTION NO. 06-04

WHEREAS, Eastern Washington University proposed to offer a Bachelor of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies; and

WHEREAS, The program would respond to demonstrated student demand by providing students with an opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary scholarship while developing skills in critical thinking and analysis, writing, and communication; and

WHEREAS, The program would serve the needs of employers and the community by preparing graduates to contribute to the community through work in a variety of service and advocacy organizations; and

WHEREAS, The program has undergone an extensive development and review process and has received support from external experts; and

WHEREAS, The costs are reasonable;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the Bachelor of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies.

Adopted:

February 23, 2006

Attest:

Gene J. Colin, Chair

Jesus Hernandez, Secretary